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MINORITY GROUPS IN THE SONGKHRAM RIVER BASIN, NORTHEAST THAILAND

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MINORITY GROUPS IN THE SONGKHRAM RIVER BASIN, NORTHEAST THAILAND

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The most important objective of this research is to include the study of fishing livelihoods of different minority groups in the Songkhram River Basin formed by the 420 km long Songkhram River. The research focuses on the two minority groups of Thaiso in Paakun village (Moo 4) and Thailao in Paakyam village located in Srisingkhram subdistrict in Nakhon Phanom province. The Songkhram river passes through these two villages where fishing is the main livelihood. The study examines fishing abilities of the fishers of the minority groups and their differences. The concept framework of the study uses independent variables including: characteristic of the village population, skills, endurance, capacity to undertake risks, adaptability to changes in technology and fishing equipment during the different periods until the present, and the management of fishing yields in terms of market mechanisms. The study points to the efficiency of the fishing livelihoods of the Thaiso and thailao as independent variables.

The study method: the use of qualitative study by using the method of indepth interviews including information from documents, and interviews with fishermen from Thaiso, Thailao and other groups in order to obtain wide and indepth vision of the two dimensions :1) view from the inside;2) view from the outside, viz other minority groups in nearby or surrounding villages in the area in order to seek out the best possible research answers.

The results of the study is divided into three periods with factors relation to the efficiency fishermen of Thaiso in Paakun village. In the first period from 1893 to 1952, the Thaiso had skills in using basic fishing equipment such as *hae*, *ped*, *sai*, *hong*. The fish catch was used as barter to obtain rice, no money was used. In the subsequent period, villagers learned to construck *rua naeb* or fishing boats and fishing nets called *mong* and *sadung* from the Chao Yuan (term used to describe Thai descendants of early Vietnamese migrant) This required investing money to buy raw material and equipment.

In the second period between 1952 to 1977, fishing equipment developed to become larger and was used along with river transportation such as *bamboo rafts*, row boats or with fishing equipment such as *sadung* and *son*. In 1952, motors began to be attached to fishing boats and boats were being designed to be used along with different fishing equipment. Moreover, there were materials like nylon which replaced the use of natural fibres like fibre from tree bark, jute grass and string. All these factors increased the money invested. Most of the Thaiso continued to use traditonal equipment since they had insufficient funds to buy equipment, and also lacked the endurance to use the equipment in during the

late nights when the weather is cooler. At the same time, Thailao, Thaiyoy villagers were getting better yields since they invested money as well as endured the physical difficulties in using the newer equipment.

In the third period, from 1977 to the present, fishing practices changed in form to enable more fish catch every time through the use of equipment that cost several thousand Baht such as *pongpaan* (or *thong*) and *daangkat*. Some of the groups with better financial capabilities like the Chinese, Thailao, Thaiyoy either jointly or individually invested in buying the equipment. The village groups in the financial middle-range could still use equipment such as *sadung*, *son*, *mongkwaat*.

In this period, Thaiso under the instructions of a Buddhist monk returned to do rice farming which is a profession they are skilled at and less risky in terms of investment. Subsequently, the majority of Thaiso migrated to find new areas for their farming livelihood. Presently, there are only two to three Thaiso families dependent on fishing as their livelihood in Paakun village.

The study of the Thailao in Paakyam village found that in the period 1904 to 1957, the Thailao migrated from many villages along the Mekong River banks: Suwannakhet (Lao), Thatphanom, Thauthane, Chaiburi. At the same time, there were groups of Chinese, Poothai, Thaiyoy, Thaiyoy who emigrated to establish settlements to catch fish, and sell rice in rice mills. The Thailao fishing equipment was basic using *ped*, *hae*, *mong*, *hong*. Subsequently, they used equipment learned from the Yuan such as *rua naeb* (fishing boat). The commercial profession of the various groups; Thailao, Poothai, and the Chinese increased the competition over fishing, boat building, and the river transport of rice.

During the second period from 1957 to 1970, motors were attached to fishing boats along with various equipment such as *sadung*, *son*. This further increased the investment required by the Thailao. With the Chinese maintaining shops in the village, the Thailao were put at a disadvantage. But most of them still took the risk of investing which resulted in obtaining more efficient fishing equipment and better economic gains especially during 1939 when the second world war and the Japanese invasion had pushed up the prices of fish and fish products like *plaraa* (fermented fish paste). When infrastructure development in the rural areas increased with roads being built, vehicles began to play a bigger role in transporting rice and *plaraa* to greater distances. Paakyam became one of the biggest sources of fresh fish and *plaraa* in Nakhon Phanom province.

In the third period from 1970 to the present, *pongpaang* (or *thong*) had an increasing role in fishing even though the equipment was costly, the Thailao tried to find money to buy it and reserve places in the river to set it up. The Chinese, Thaiyoy, Poothai, Thaiyoy were doing the same, which increased the competition between the different groups although each group's potential was different. This pressured the Thailao who were the majority in Paakyam village to become outstanding in their abilities to catch fish and join together with groups using the *thong*, which can be considered a praiseworthy effort.

In summary, the differences between the minority groups of Thaiso and Thailao is in terms of development of skills for livelihoods. Thaiso have more skills in farming since fishing needs endurance in cold weather, financial ability, sharing of money to buy equipment, and the knowledge of the market. In this regard, the Thailao, Poothai are better able to adapt than the Thaiso. For the above reasons, Thaiso migrated out of Paakum and allowed the opportunity for Thailao, Thaiyor to enter and fish in the village as a majority group while the remaining Thaiso were reduced to a minority.

Vocabulary

1. Hea () Cast Net
2. Ped () Pola and line
3. Sai () Bamboo Trap
4. Hong () Set Bamboo Trap
5. Rua naeb () White Board Catch Boat
6. Mong () Encircling Gile Net
7. Sadung () Dip Net
8. Son () Boat Dip Net
9. Pongpaan or thong () Set Bag Net
10. Daangkat () Gill Net
11. Mongkwaat () Simple Beach Scine

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Villagers Interviewed

Name	Age	Village
1. Krajang Mongkolnam	51	Paakyam
2. Kong Bunyaasri	70	Paakyam
3. Kwanjai Kasemsri (Ms.)	29	Paakun
4. Jit Yodsuban	50	Paakun
5. Narong Kanthacha	45	Paakyam
6. Thawee Chaipakdee	39	Paakyam
7. Thongmii Sakeda	67	Paakun
8. Nara Bunyasri	54	Paakyam
9. Nikom Sarilot	35	Paakyam
10. Banyat Un-glom	36	Paakun
11. Bang Yodsuwan	77	Paakun
12. Prayong Chaiwong	67	Paakyam
13. Phai Chaipakdee	71	Paakyam
14. Prommii Nakajat	60	Paakyam
15. Ponsawan Maneepakon	58	Paakyam
16. Paensri Denchaiwong	52	Paakyam
17. Pon Noibanthom	73	Paakyam
18. Monthaa Chaipakdee	70	Paakyam
19. Mukda Kanthacha	40	Paajyam
20. Yom Wongwandee	73	Paakyam
21. Yod Sarilot	32	Paakyam
22. Lid Kanthacha	53	Paakyam
23. Wira Chaiwong	40	Paakyam
24. Son Chartpoo	63	Paakyam
25. Somrot Bunyasri	70	Paakyam
26. Sai Chaipakdee	93	Paakyam
27. Suthet Un-glom	60	Paakun
28. Sow Srinachai	48	Paakyam
29. Sawaung Saengchan	56	Paakun
30. Sawai Kasemsin	63	Paakun
31. Ouiheng Saejang	50	Paakun
32. Amnuay Pipattanasuk	61	Paakyam